



February 27, 2014

Legislative Inaction on Universal Background Check Legislation

Nearly one year ago, I stood in this very spot and asked these questions:

How much longer will we consider dead six-year olds, domestic violence victims, and other innocent victims of gun crimes to be acceptable losses – simply collateral damage – sacrificed for easy access to deadly weapons?

After Columbine this legislature did – nothing.

After Virginia Tech this legislature did – nothing.

After Aurora, and Brookfield, and Oak Creek, and Tucson this legislature did – absolutely nothing.

Even now, more than a year after Newtown – we still have done - nothing.

The legislature in Wisconsin has done nothing to prevent criminals from easily purchasing guns. It's done nothing whatsoever to ensure that felons, domestic abusers, and others who are legally prohibited from owning, or even possessing, firearms can't easily buy them over the internet or at gun shows in our state.

Think about that. We have public safety laws that say only law-abiding citizens can purchase guns, and then at the same time, we have loopholes so large as to make those laws useless. A dangerous criminal or domestic abuser can't legally go to the local gun store to buy a handgun or rifle where background checks are mandatory. But in five minutes online or at a gun show, he or she can be the new owner of a bright, shiny new 50 caliber Desert Eagle, a 357 magnum, or the gun of choice for mass shooters in America, an AR-15.

Opponents of sensible gun safety legislation will claim that support for these bills has dropped as the memory of the children and teachers killed at Newtown fades. However, they would be wrong.

In a poll for CBS this past December, 85% of the people surveyed said they favored universal background checks. This included 84% of Republicans and 84% of gun-owners.*

Some hard-core opponents of common-sense gun safety measures use the "slippery slope" argument that universal background checks lead to gun registries and confiscation.

This is just a fear tactic used by Second Amendment absolutists who don't have the facts on their side. Every empirical study shows the weakness of their argument, so they jump to the "worst case scenario" they can think of in order to scare people into agreeing with them. Some members of our legislature have actually told me they don't believe in any gun regulations at all. And thus the carnage goes on.

In the last week, John Hopkins reported that the firearm murder rate in Missouri rose significantly since that state eliminated mandatory background checks for all handgun purchases five years ago. The law had been in effect since 1921, but was repealed under pressure from the gun lobby. Approximately 60 more people a year are being killed in Missouri by assailants using guns. Every year, 60 more families lose loved ones for no good reason other than to allow “private dealers” to make more sales.

Background checks by licensed dealers have already prevented more than 2 million felons and other people prohibited from owning firearms from purchasing them. It is reasonable to surmise that some of these same people went on to purchase guns through means that do not require background checks. The simple fact is Background Checks Save Lives. If the evidence is sufficient to mandate them for some sales, it should be common sense to apply them to all sales.

Now, I would like to introduce Dane County Sheriff, Dave Mahoney, a professional law enforcement officer for 33 years and my sheriff since his election in 2006. Sheriff Mahoney has graciously agreed to answer any questions you may have.

*CBS News Poll – Dec. 4-8, 2013